

COMMENTS ON SCOTT AND PONSODA'S (1996)  
POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE FLASHBULB MEMORIES<sup>1</sup>

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*Summary.*—Most of the events studied in flashbulb memory research are negative. Scott and Ponsoda (1996) are thoroughly commended for examining differences between positive and negative flashbulbs. Here we address three points. First, we note that other applicable research on autobiographical memory exists and stress that research on flashbulb memories should be prevented from becoming an isolated topic. Second, we identify some areas wherein flashbulb research has been applied, which help explain why there has been an imbalance towards negative events. Finally, we discuss some of the methodological difficulties matching positive and negative events.

Flashbulb memories have become part of the psychological curriculum. Scott and Ponsoda (1996) examined such memories by asking about several positive and negative news events. This is important because researchers have tended to look at memories for disasters and assassinations. Scott and Ponsoda (1996, p. 467) go further and declare that “all previous reports on the phenomenon of flashbulb memories relate to hearing of shocking (or ‘bad’) news; in other words, of negative affect.” However, in several studies, for example Conway, *et al.* (1994), there is no claim that the event was negative for most of the sample. In fact, Conway, *et al.* did ask whether people thought it was a positive or negative event (*valence* is listed in their Appendix A), but as it did not influence the over-all *affect* score it is not discussed in their text (see also Tromp, Koss, Figueredo, & Tharan, 1995). More importantly, other related studies have examined the differences in memories for positive and negative events. We are thinking primarily of the several prior diary studies (for example, Wagenaar, 1992), but relevant work in other areas (especially in clinical research) also exists. Thus, research on flashbulb memories is in danger of becoming isolated by focusing too much on specific claims arising from within the research.

Our second point is simply to put into perspective why there has been more interest in negative flashbulb memories than positive ones. The simplest answer is that these seem the most memorable to the lay person. As most research on flashbulb memory has looked at news events—and as newspaper editors know, the typical piece of bad news sells more papers than good news—the dominance of negative memories is difficult to avoid if news events are used. More recently there has been much interest in the

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memories of people with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. People's reported flashbacks, with respect to PTSD, are almost all negative, giving another reason for the bias on negative events; however, when examined systematically, Berntsen (1996) has shown that involuntary memories are more pleasant than voluntary ones. Similarly, reports of alleged "recovered" memories (see Loftus, 1993) are almost completely of negative, sometimes horrific, events. As yet, however, there have been no systematic investigations of the proportion of positive versus negative recovered memories. In addition, several other areas within and outside psychology have adopted the concept of flashbulb memories. For example, consider recent work in anthropology by Whitehouse (1996) who differentiated between "routinized" rituals and infrequent or one-off rituals. The latter, he proposed leads to flashbulb memories and are often of frightening events. However, positive cultural events—high school graduations, weddings, etc.—can also be well remembered (Robinson, 1992). From these examples, it appears that Scott and Ponsoda's (1996) readdressing of the balance is a good approach.

Finally, without having good knowledge of the prevalence of positive and negative events (or flashbulbs), it is difficult to "match" events so that "all other things are equal," a condition assumed for causal attribution in experimental psychology (see Wright & Gaskell, 1995). It would have been useful to know all the events that Scott and Ponsoda (1996) used and how they matched the events, other than by year. Given their welcomed examination of how differences in events are associated with different kinds of recollection, knowing the events is of value.

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## FACTOR STRUCTURE OF THE WAIS-R ITALIAN VERSION COMPARED WITH AMERICAN AND BRITISH SOLUTIONS<sup>1</sup>

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**Summary.**—The WAIS-R was administered to a sample of 180 young Italian adults (aged 19 to 35 years). A principal components analysis was conducted on the 11 subtests to investigate the factor structure. According to the criteria of extraction, one- and three-factor solutions are discussed. The oblique rotation provided evidence for three correlated factors, 1: Verbal, 2: Perceptual Organization, and 3: Freedom from Distractibility. However, to compare Italian results with those obtained in the USA and UK, an orthogonal rotation was performed. High coefficients of congruence point to similarity of factor loading matrices in all three countries.

The publication of the WAIS-R (Wechsler, 1981) stimulated several attempts to verify the factor structure of this version. Many researchers have analyzed the WAIS-R scales using factorial techniques to establish the components and the nature of human intelligence as measured (see Lickliter, Matarazzo, & Silverstein, 1986); however, this research has not fully resolved the problem of the number of factors as from one to four factors, even two and three factors, have predominated.

Ryan, Paolo, and Smith (1992), Athanasou (1993), and Sturmey, Gatherer, Ghadiali, Hallett, and Searle (1993) extracted only two factors. The first was a "verbal" factor on which Information, Vocabulary, Arithmetic, Comprehension, and Similarity loaded. The second was the "perceptual organization" factor on which Picture Completion, Picture Arrangement, Block Design, Object Assembly, Digit Span, and Digit Symbol loaded.

Authors such as Atkinson, Cyr, Doxey, and Vigna (1989), Crawford, Allan, Stephen, Parker, and Besson (1989), and Burgess, Flint, and Adshead (1992) supported a three-factor solution in which the same two factors emerged, while Arithmetic and Digit Span loaded on a third separate factor often called "Freedom from Distractibility."

In a recent paper, Paolo and Ryan (1994) conducted a factor analysis on the WAIS-R by educational level. In a sample of elderly persons, the authors showed that two factors emerged for subjects with 0 to 11 years of education, while a three-factor solution was more suitable for subjects with more than 12 years of education.

Several authors (Siegert, Patten, Taylor, & McCormick, 1988; Craw-

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